



from the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee
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Sorensen and Whittle provide perspectives on South Carolina's progress toward 2010 goal

Editor's Note: A luncheon was held December 10, 1:00 p.m., at the Clarion Townhouse Hotel, where the EOC released the 2010 status report. In addition to members of the EOC, Dr. Andrew Sorensen and Mr. Mack Whittle provided perspectives from higher education and the business community.

A pdf copy of the 2010 Goal publication is available from the EOC website at www.eoc.sc.gov, under "2010 Goal."

Columbia – The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee (EOC) today presented its annual report on South Carolina's effort to reach the 2010 goal, which states that by the year 2010, South Carolina's student achievement will be ranked in the top half of states nationally. The goal, which was established in 1999, further states that South Carolina "must become one of the five fastest improving systems in the country."

In a unique setting involving legislative leaders in education, as well as business and education leaders from around the state, perspectives on the goal were provided from Dr. Andrew Sorensen, President of the University of South Carolina, and Mack Whittle, Jr., Chairman and CEO of The South Financial Group and Carolina First Bank. Both stressed that a quality education system is the foundation for a prosperous, economic future in South Carolina.

Mike Brennan, a business member of the EOC and President of SC BB&T, presented South Carolina's progress and ranking on measures which a national comparison could be made. "This national lens that we are looking at ourselves through is critical if we are to remain competitive on certain measures and become competitive in others," stated Brennan.

The Nation's Report Card, or the National Assessment of Education Progress, shows South Carolina slipping in rankings for math and reading. On three out of the six NAEP comparisons, South Carolina was one of the five fastest improving systems in the country. Items of note include:

- 4th grade Math – the Nation's Report Card (2007)
 - SC ranked 33rdth in the nation.
 - Seven-year improvement (2000-2007) sixth largest jump nationwide.
- 8th grade Math – the Nation's Report Card (2007)
 - SC ranked 28th in the nation.

- Seven-year improvement (2000-2007) largest jump nationwide.
- 4th grade Science – the Nation's Report Card (2005)
 - SC ranked 33rd in the nation.
 - Five-year improvement (2000-2005) largest jump nationwide.
- 8th grade Science – the Nation's Report Card (2005)
 - SC ranked 30th in the nation.
 - Five-year improvement (2000-2005) third largest jump nationwide.

South Carolina's reading performance, in both the 4th and 8th grades, slipped from 2003. Based on data from the 2007 4th grade reading assessment, SC ranks 42nd in the nation in a comparison of average scale scores nationwide. In 8th grade reading, SC ranks 41st nationwide.

Brenan emphasized the importance of reading, identifying it as the most critical area of academic need in South Carolina. "Without a foundation in reading, we cannot expect our students to succeed in other subjects and in life....We need to place a greater priority on it outside the classroom and within our homes," stressed Brenan.

Brenan also presented data regarding SAT and ACT, two college admissions tests given nationwide. Although South Carolina's ten-year improvement on the SAT, reflects a gain of 31 points, SC ranks 48th among states on the SAT and ACT. Sixty-two percent of SC high school graduates took the SAT in 2007, and the state ranks 18th in participation. Comparably, 43 percent of high school graduates took the ACT in 2007.

Although ranking states on the basis of SAT performance is often criticized, Brenan notes "the measure has meaning to our students as they plan for postsecondary education and as an indicator of how various groups of students are performing."

South Carolina ranked in the top half of states nationally in both participation in and passage of Advanced Placement Courses, which are "nationally recognized for their challenging curricula." Most colleges and universities award college credit to students who score well on AP end-of-course exams. Points in the presentation included:

- SC's AP participation rank (22nd) was determined in a comparison of the percent of 2006 high school graduates, as reported by the College Board. In 2006, 22 percent of those students in SC took an AP exam in high school. Between 2000 and 2006, SC's rate of participation increased 4.3 points.
- SC's AP passage rank (23rd) was determined in a comparison of the percent of students in the graduating class of 2006 who scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam at any point during high school. In 2006, 12.5 percent of graduates in SC scored a 3 or higher on an AP exam in 2006. Between 2000 and 2006, SC's passage rate increased 2.5 percentage points.

Brenan also presented data regarding the achievement gap that exists among students of different racial/ethnic groups and different economic status. Stressing that the gaps "remain persistent," Brenan pointed to comparisons made on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT), Advanced Placement participation and passage, as well as gaps on the SAT and ACT.

Improvement in reducing the gap in performance in PACT English Language Arts occurred between white and African American students, as well as pay and free/reduced price lunch students. The gap between white and African American students on the SAT also decreased seven points, between 2002

and 2007. Between white and Hispanic students, the gap in ACT performance decreased one-tenth of a point between 2002 and 2007.

In AP performance, Brennan pointed out that the gap between white and African American students has narrowed nearly six points in ten years. He reminded luncheon participants that schools would be honored in spring 2008 for making progress in reducing the achievement gap.

Brennan urged luncheon participants to use data and information as opportunities to make an impact in the lives of South Carolina's children.

"We must look inward for strength and promote change," Brennan said. "The future of our entire citizenry demands that we act immediately."

The SC Education Oversight Committee is an independent, non-partisan group made up of 18 educators, business persons, and elected leaders. Created in 1998, the committee is dedicated to reporting facts, measuring change, and promoting progress within South Carolina's education system.

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